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This Week in Wabash



Hello Wabash,

Happy Monday. I hope your week is off to a great start. The weather has been hot and there's been a lot of ozone and allergens in the air, so even though it looks nice most of the time lately, it's been less than enjoyable actually being out in it than one might expect. Even so, we were able to get the family out to a new park this weekend, which was nice. I hope to explore more while the weather is more agreeable.

In this week's newsletter, I wanted to draw your attention to [the centerpiece story from Saturday's newspaper](#). It's about a significant step in a process designed to curb local population loss that I've been covering for years now. The story has also been picked up by the [Hoosier State Press Association's news wire service](#) and has been offered to newspapers across the state.

Members of the combined Wabash County, Wabash and North Manchester plan commissions met Thursday, June 16 on stage in the auditorium of Wabash High School to approve the recently-released [Imagine One 85 \(IO85\) Comprehensive Plan](#).

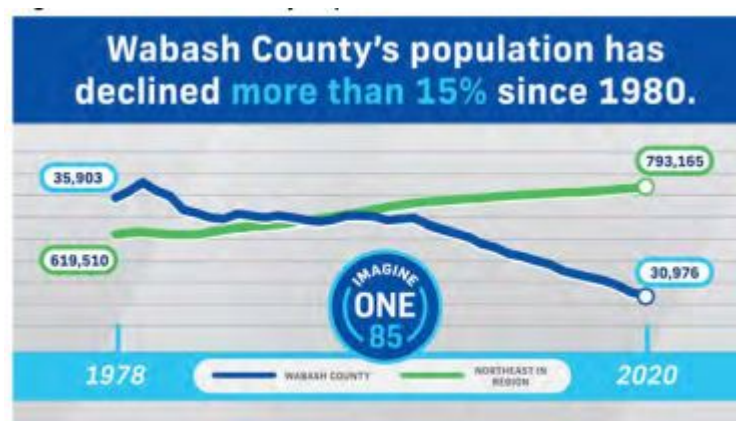
The meeting was led by Grow Wabash County (GWC) president and CEO Keith Gillenwater and Community Foundation of Wabash County (CFWC) executive director Patty Grant.

In March, the CFWC and GWC released the first publicly available version of the IO85 comprehensive plan. The group had been hard at work on the project for months. This planning process was launched in July 2020 and was anticipated to last 14 months in total. Dozens of community members gathered for the Imagine One 85 Summit on July 14, 2021, in Honeywell Center Plaza, to help provide their input into the proposed plan.

While northeast Indiana's 11-county region has consistently grown for four decades, Wabash County has not. The 11-county region's 2020 population total was

797,701 people for Adams, Allen, DeKalb, Huntington, Kosciusko, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, Wells and Whitley counties, compared to 759,086 in 2010. The three counties that lost population in the past decade were Huntington, Noble and Wabash counties at 462, 79 and 1,912 residents respectively.

After four decades of population decline, there are now around 5,000 fewer residents, a 14 percent decline, one-half of the city of Wabash. To regain the local population and continue to grow as communities, Wabash County will need to add 85 households each year. In addition to general population loss, Wabash County's labor force has taken a significant hit over the past few years, down from 15,048 in December 2019 to 14,234 in December 2020.



Source: U.S. Census

The stated goal of Imagine One 85 is to come up with a plan that “will ensure our future is not left to chance.”

The 100-page, seven-chapter plan includes 85 action items aimed at growing Wabash County's population.

The plan's 85 unique recommendations are organized into four topic areas that emerged through community engagement sessions and technical analysis.

These areas include:

Great Places: Preserving, enhancing, and strengthening the natural environment.

Prosperity: Fostering a strong entrepreneurial spirit, growing the economy and supporting educational and professional development.

Housing and Community: Increasing residential options and diversifying housing stock.

Foundations: Strengthening and modernizing infrastructure and improving community connections, design, and efficiency. First to be addressed are a select number of priority actions aimed at reversing population decline. The plan closes with an implementation agenda that keeps the plan moving forward and avoids the common problem of comprehensive plans – good plans that get shelved.

The next steps would be to take the plan to the local public bodies including the Wabash County Commissioners, Wabash City Council and North Manchester Town Council for final adoption.

Well, that's all I have for you today. I hope you have a great rest of your week.

Best,
Rob



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